

Red Flag Fire Alert

from the SC Forestry Commission



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SC Forestry Commission issuing statewide Red Flag Fire Alert

Increase in wildfire ignitions, uptick in acres burned and strong winds prompt agency warning

COLUMBIA—The South Carolina Forestry Commission is issuing a statewide Red Flag Fire Alert, effective at 6 a.m. Monday, March 7.

The alert is being issued to discourage people from burning outdoors when weather conditions present an elevated risk of wildfire. In addition to weather forecasts for most of the state calling for higher-than-normal winds and wind gusts in the near term, the agency is already responding to a dramatic uptick in wildfire ignitions in the past 72 hours.

The agency has recorded 106 wildfires that have burned more than 1,500 acres between Thursday and Saturday, adding to a busy season that has already seen more wildfires in the first three months of 2022 than all of last fiscal year.

“One of our major concerns in addition to the elevated fire danger itself is that fire activity may exceed our capacity to respond. These conditions could create a scenario where we have more fires than we have resources,” said SCFC Fire Chief Darryl Jones. “The increase in fires is something we expect and plan for at the start of spring every year, but strong winds can really push fire danger to its limit, and we’re seeing that now.”

The high winds and gusts, combined with the very dry fuels on the ground, are also leading to re-ignitions of previously contained fires. While March is historically one of the busiest months for the Forestry Commission, firefighters on the ground are reporting this week’s spate of more frequent and larger-than-average fires are taking longer – and more firefighting resources – to contain and ultimately control.

A Red Flag Fire Alert does not prohibit outdoor burning, provided that all other state and local regulations are followed, but the Forestry Commission uses the alert to strongly encourage citizens to voluntarily postpone any such burning until the alert is lifted.

Although a Red Flag Fire Alert does not ban outdoor burning, it does trigger certain county or local ordinances that restrict outdoor fires, so residents should contact their local fire departments to check whether such restrictions apply in their areas. SCFC officials expect to lift the alert later in the week as weather conditions improve.

Did you know...?

An astounding 98 percent of all wildland fires are caused by human activities, and escaped debris burns are responsible for nearly 50 percent of them.

South Carolina Forestry Commission firefighters respond to an average of 2,500 wildland fires every year, burning about 18,000 acres annually.

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